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Central Employment Agency

Students respond to the CIA rush

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On Washington's Massachusetts Avenue, sandwiched between the flag-waving embassies of Chile and Canada, stands the Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies. Its sandy, concrete walls and stiff, rectangular windows mirror the bland facade of the Brookings Institution across the street.

I visited the School of Advanced International Studies—which everyone there calls SAIS (rhymes with nice)—one cold and rainy morning last December. A recruiter from the Central Intelligence Agency was scheduled to interview a dozen SAIS students that day, and I, too, was eager to talk with them. I wanted to find out what these students were like, why they would want to work for the CIA, and how they could justify their interest in such a career.

This was no idle concern, for the CIA is enjoying a remarkable renaissance on American college campuses. Gone is the militant protest, gone is the stigma. "The view of the Agency is very good. We're doing very well," says a CIA officer knowledgeable about the recruitment effort. The officer, who asked that his name not be used, says the Agency now recruits openly on 300 campuses. Pay for a graduating senior typically starts between \$17,000 and \$27,000.

"Students seem to be much more responsive" than they were even five years ago, and "more are applying, certainly," the CIA man says. He attributes this positive reception, in part, to an increased level of patriotism. "I've gotten an awful lot of

that," he says, adding that anti-CIA demonstrations on campus have "dramatically declined."

The resurgence of the CIA on campus is the most obvious indication of the attitudes characterizing today's students. Conservatism once again prevails in the society at large, and the resilience of America's imperial culture finds expression in the application forms addressed to William Casey as much as in the jingoist huzzahs over the invasion of Grenada.

Outside the SAIS recruiting office, I camped on a three-cushioned couch that served as the on-deck circle for the applicants. My first interviewee, Michael Peck, a student in "conflict management," was reluctant to tell me what had drawn him to the CIA, but he did offer some general insights. "I know everyone here who is interviewing," he said. "It's not the James Bond, John Wayne approach, but a very pragmatic one, with a little idealism."

Peck was enthusiastic about the resources the Agency offers to the specialist in foreign affairs. "The possibility to broaden your area of expertise is what brings people to this job," he said. "The CIA guarantees you a total preoccupation with your interest, and it provides you with first-hand experience." To this professional inducement, Peck added a dash of patriotism. "Take Nathan Hale," he said. "The guy had a certain commitment to make, and he made it."

Drawing a sharp distinction between the analysis side of the CIA, where research is conducted, and the operations side, where the traditional cloak-and-dagger spy work is performed, Peck said he was interested only in analysis. He had some problems with covert action. "If there's any other way but violence, I'm for it," he said. "Defense of the homeland has a justification. If that means covert action in a foreign

country, though, I haven't made up my mind."

Our conversation was cut short by the CIA recruiter, a middle-aged woman with close-cropped brown hair, wearing a maroon sweater, matching shin-length skirt, and unpolished blue low-heel shoes two decades out of fashion. She opened the door to the interviewing office, dismissed one student, and invited Peck in with the fetching phrase, "Next victim."

I followed the previous victim down a couple of flights of stairs to a basement locker room. As he took off his gray sport jacket and tie, he explained why he had signed up to interview with the CIA: "It's one of the few careers directly related to the education here." He was an international relations and economics major.

When I asked him about CIA abuses, this applicant became defensive. "Certainly things aren't happening the way they were in '73 in Chile or in '54 in Guatemala," he said. And even if the Agency did something he couldn't endorse, that would not have any bearing on his work. "You can compartmentalize," he explained. "If I'm an analyst with them, they may knock off a Chilean leader, but I didn't do it. I'm an analyst." He later asked me not to use his name.

Elizabeth Michels, next in line for an interview at SAIS, also viewed working for the CIA as a way of pursuing her academic interest, international economics. "The work they do is highly respected," she said. "It is thorough and highly professional. That's not a bad sort of agency to be associated with."

Her admiration for the scholarly reputation of the CIA stemmed in part from her contact with professors at Georgetown University who had worked for the Agency. "They were some of the most brilliant people in the field," she said, and impressed

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